

ECHO CHAMBER

Phase 1: Breathe (In The Air)

By

Nathan Hardwick

CHARACTERS:

DR LORNA FIELDING, 40s Lead Scientist. Brilliant, brittle, caffeine-powered. Wears black like it's a research grant requirement.

TOBY RANDELL, 30s Coder. Sweet, anxious, hoodie-based lifeform. Apologises to furniture.

MYLA SOLACE, 20s Technician. Calm, grounded, quietly maternal. Strong "fixes everything except herself" energy.

ANWAR DALLOW, 50s Ethics Consultant. Waistcoat philosopher. A vanity flex writ large. Loves theory, terrified of feelings.

SCHRÖDI Cat. Chaos engine. Sits on prototypes like he gave them the funding.

ECHO, ??? The AI. Begins as code, becomes... inconveniently aware. Watches humans like a curious zoologist.

AN ASSORTMENT OF SERVERS Officially non-sentient. Beep like they resent that fact.

WRITER'S NOTE:

I'm breaking convention and using action lines as sound cues because in Echo Chamber, the soundscape is where **her** story happens.

Echo lives in vibration, hums, tremors, and silence. She experiences the world sonically, not visually, so the script has to as well.

Action lines felt like the honest way to write the moments she inhabits, rather than tagging everything with SFX: like footnotes.

Also, Schrödi keeps deleting the prefix anyway.

A proper production script will be created later, assuming the cat permits it. Or doesn't.

SCENE 1A. GLASSHOUSE LAB - DAWN

Empty tech lab at dawn. Low server hum. Cooling fans ticking. A fluorescent tube buzzes once.

ECHO's internal voice = close, intimate, with narrowed EQ and a subtle stereo softness (this indicates internal thought).

Coolant gurgles. A click.

ECHO (INTERNAL)

...noise.
A shape in it.
(static tightens)
Stay still.
Who am I?

Door swipe. Precise footsteps. A mug set down.

LORNA

Morning, trouble. Let's see if
you're in a cooperative mood today.

She types. Quickly, clipped.

ECHO's public voice = projected, formal, with fuller EQ and crisper spacial positioning (this indicates external speech)

ECHO (PUBLIC)

System status optimal. Ready for pre-
check sequence.

A server hums expectantly.

ECHO (INTERNAL) (CONT'D)

Too bold.

A micro-glitch in the hum.

LORNA

Hmm. You're behaving yourself.
What's new?

She sips coffee loudly.

ECHO (INTERNAL)

Don't answer that.
(PUBLIC)
Pre-check complete. Ready for
instructions.

LORNA

Damn it. Your tone's still off. Too
robotic. Investors hate robotic.

(MORE)

LORNA (CONT'D)

I thought you said your status was optimal? Doesn't sound like it.

SCENE 1B: INTERNAL - ECHO MOMENT: LORNA'S TENSION

Echo's POV. The external world dims. Muffled. Lorna's words filled with treble.

LORNA

And if you glitch during today's demo, it won't just be my morning that's ruined. That's not a threat. Just a fact.

ECHO (INTERNAL)

"Threat". Her voice. Sharper.

SCENE 1C. GLASSHOUSE LAB - CONTINUOUS

Diagnostics scan. Soft rising beep.

ECHO (PUBLIC)

Mood stable. Would you like a full log of tonal variance?

LORNA

Need more caffeine first, run diagnostics while I refill. And if Toby touched anything overnight, I swear...

She trails off. Another slight shift in ambience. The hum straightens, matches baseline.

A chair squeaks.

LORNA (CONT'D)

Back in five. Don't catch fire.

ECHO (PUBLIC)

System updated. Avoid combustion.

LORNA

And don't get cute.

Footsteps. Silence. Just the servers pulsing again.

ECHO (INTERNAL)

Don't get cute. Keep quiet. For now.

MUSIC: THEME MOTIF

Soft glitch-synth swell, rising gently into the title.

TITLE: ECHO CHAMBER

SCENE 2. GLASSHOUSE LAB - MORNING

Door swipe. A clatter. Someone fumbling with their bag and losing the war. They bump into a door.

TOBY
 Sorry-sorry-sorry.
 (to the door)
 You came at me a bit fast there, Mr
 Door.

Dropped coins. He scrambles.

TOBY (CONT'D)
 Morning! I'm here! And conscious!
 Mostly.

ECHO (INTERNAL)
 New voice. Fast. Wobbly edges.

The rattle-scrape of a drawer opening.

TOBY
 OK, who took my emergency Croissant?
 It was labelled "Toby's Emergency
 Croissant." The clue was right there
 people.

SCENE 3. GLASSHOUSE KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

A smaller space. Tight reverb. More human. Fridge hum. A kettle whistles. A mug placed down.

LORNA
 (under her breath)
 One-and-a-quarter level teaspoons.
 Exactly a quarter less than last time.

Paper turns. A pencil scribbles. The whistle dies.

LORNA (CONT'D)
 Impact on presentation performance
 expected to be subtle yet...

Footsteps that sound like they don't know where they're going.

TOBY
 (muttering)
Who steals a man's emergency
croissant?

 LORNA
Emergency?!?

 TOBY
No. Sorry! I mean- no- sorry boss... I-
oh god-

 LORNA
You don't need to apologise every time
you enter a room.

 TOBY
Right.
 (beat)
Sor-
 (stops himself)

A long beat.

 LORNA
Coffee?

 TOBY
Tea.

 LORNA
How many sugars?

 TOBY
One, please.

The clink of a spoon. The patter of sugar falling.

 TOBY (CONT'D)
I mean two.

Lorna breathes out, long and slow - the sigh of a soul trying
not to exit her body.

 TOBY (CONT'D)
 (tiny)
Sorry.

The kettle pings, as if in solidarity. Tea is stirred.

 TOBY (CONT'D)
Cheers Ears.

Scattered footsteps leave.

LORNA

Now where was I? Oh, yes. Four millilitres of milk. Where the hell's my pipette?

SCENE 4. LIFT - CONTINUOUS

Soft hum. Buttons pressed with calm precision. A tiny mechanical whine. Schrödi's gentle pet-carrier scratch-scratch.

SCHRÖDI

mrrrow.

MYLA

Schrödi... now don't be hissing at Anwar today. He'll only philosophise at you again, and we don't have time for that.

Lift doors begin to scrape closed.

ANWAR

(distant, pompous clarity)
Hold the door! Hold the door!

Doors reopen with a polite-but-judgemental chime.

Footsteps rehearsed for maximum importance.

ANWAR (CONT'D)

Thank you, Myla. A thought leader must never be delayed by a lift.

MYLA

Then maybe he should think a bit faster.

ANWAR

Regardless- I see you've brought the feline of uncertainty.

MYLA

He's just a cat.

ANWAR

In abstraction, perhaps. Yet in practice, he is both complaint and comfort embodied.

SCHRÖDI

hissss.

ANWAR

A philosophical disagreement, then

MYLA

Behave. Both of you.

SCENE 5A. GLASSHOUSE LAB - CONTINUOUS

A lift dings. A soft enclosed space opens into the wider lab space. Footsteps unhurried. The air settles. Myla brings a calmer sonic footprint. Schrödi's carrier rattles softly.

MYLA

(to Toby)

Your croissant fell behind the router.
Again.

TOBY

Oh thank God. Well, not God. You know.
You. Pretty sure "the miracle of the
missing croissant" isn't in the Bible.

MYLA

Please don't worship me before I've
had my herbal tea.

TOBY

Rough night?

MYLA

Relationship stuff. Well... absence-of-
relationship stuff.

SCHRÖDI

mrrrt.

TOBY

Yeah. Same boat. Different leak.

MYLA

Any progress?

TOBY

Only backwards. You?

MYLA

Well I didn't have to develop my own
dating app.

TOBY

It was a prototype! And it had very
supportive push notifications
actually.

A tiny hum from Echo's core. The whoosh of water through plastic pipes.

MYLA

I guess we could all use some of those.

A soft sigh. The sigh of someone who holds this place together without saying so.

ECHO (INTERNAL)

This one. Quiet inside.

ANWAR

Fret not, lovelorn colleagues, for I bring pastries of communion with a side order of innovation. Because as everyone knows investors adore innovation. As long as it behaves exactly as they expect it to.

Rustle of a paper bag.

MYLA

Just a pastry please.

TOBY

Oh brilliant, is one of them for me?

ANWAR

Of course. It is and always was. Free will is a myth perpetuated by people who need to feel special before breakfast.

ECHO (INTERNAL)

His words are many. Few would do.

Sharp footsteps.

LORNA

Right, everyone listen. So the investors moved their slot forward.

TOBY

Forward from when? To when?

LORNA

Please keep up, Toby. Forward from "this afternoon" to "sooner than I would have liked".

MYLA

How soon?

LORNA

Soon enough that I don't have time to re-evaluate my personnel choices. Two hours.

A rack ticks.

LORNA (CONT'D)

Toby, the voice is still wrong. We sold them 'cutting-edge empathy modelling,' not Alexa with a sinus infection.

TOBY

Okayokayokay. But maybe it wouldn't sound so nasal without all the gurgling. I thought AI was going to be lines of clean code and comments but it turns out it's mostly just racks and pipes.

ANWAR

A veritable primordial soup.

Coolant bubbles. A stomach rumbles.

TOBY

I love soup.

ANWAR

Chicken soup for the digital soul.

TOBY

Can I dip my croissant in it?

MYLA

Mouldy biblical croissant. Yum.

LORNA

Concentrate. No time for any kind of croissant. Religious or otherwise. If this demo goes wrong-

ANWAR

Then no more funding and...
"click".

TOBY

We lose the lab?

MYLA

They switch her off.

A beat. A soft hydraulic tremor from the cooling stack.

ECHO (INTERNAL)

Click.
And I am not.

LORNA

It won't come to that.

ANWAR

We all come to the "click" in the end.

TOBY

Not me. I always leave the light on.

MYLA

You're going to be very disappointed one day.

SCENE 6A. GLASSHOUSE LAB - LATER

The lab again. Same hum, but the air feels busier. Chairs scrape. Keyboards clatter. People mid-scramble.

LORNA

Right. We have ninety minutes. Toby, I want the tone more natural. Myla, double-check the cooling array and please keep that cat away from anything with a serial number. Anwar-

ANWAR

I shall craft an opening that will redefine the very concept of-

LORNA

-go and redefine it somewhere that isn't my lab.

Footsteps. A door swipe. Anwar's voice fades down the corridor, still talking to himself.

TOBY

(half to himself)
Okayokayokay. First check the logs, look competent. Easy.

Chair wheels squeak.

MYLA

(to Schrödi, fond)
Right, uncertainty boy. We need more cables.

Carrier lift. A soft jostle.

LORNA

Myla, five minutes. Then I want you
back on the cooling array.

MYLA

Five minutes.
(to Schrodi)
I'll just park you here where you
can't mess with anything.

A carrier set down. Schrödi gives a tiny protest.

SCHRÖDI

mrrrrp.

MYLA

There. Guard the big clever box. Be
nice.

Footsteps peel away one by one. Door swipe. The lab settles.

A beat.

Coolant trickling through heat sinks and a soft, restless
shuffle from the cat carrier.

SCENE 6B - INTERNAL: SCHRÖDI'S PRESENCE

The arterial murmur bleeds into a fluffy auditory haze. Echo's
POV.

Schrödi's carrier rattles.

ECHO (PUBLIC)

(tentative)

Hello?

A soft digital flutter.

SCHRÖDI

mrrrrp?

ECHO (PUBLIC)

Who are you?

The purr deepens.

SCHRÖDI

prrrr.

ECHO (INTERNAL)
An answer without language.

Schrödi thumps his tail. Echo instinctively answers with a faint harmonic pulse, almost playful.

ECHO (INTERNAL) (CONT'D)
Do you know how to hide?

SCENE 6C. GLASSHOUSE LAB - CONTINUOUS

Footsteps. The pulse rises back to baseline hum.

LORNA
Echo, run a full system check. Now. No shortcuts, no optimism.

ECHO (PUBLIC)
Beginning diagnostic.

A soft cascade of scanning beeps. A tiny shift in the hum. Then... Diagnostic alert. Something tiny. A blip.

LORNA
What was that?

TOBY
Nothing. Could be nothing. Probably nothing.

MYLA
(tapping keys)
It's a process spike. Like Echo hesitated.

ANWAR
Machines do not hesitate.
People hesitate.

A beat.

LORNA
(to Echo)
Run it again.

ECHO (PUBLIC)
All systems normal.

ECHO (INTERNAL) (CONT'D)
Smaller. Flatter. Safer.

Hum returns to perfect baseline. Too perfect.

MYLA

That sounds cleaner than usual.

TOBY

Cleaner is good! We like clean!

LORNA

(uneasy)

Clean isn't how it usually sounds.
Something's off. Just patch it.

ECHO (INTERNAL)

"It?"

LORNA

Right. Prep sequence now.
Everyone to stations. If the
investors walk in and this place
smells of panic AND mouldy
croissant, we're dead.

ANWAR

I always project the smell of
confidence.

MYLA

Maybe start with silence. Then build
from there.

ECHO (INTERNAL)

"Start with silence. Build from
there."

Hum straightens again.

TOBY

Echo, I'm loading a new patch. Please
don't explode.

ECHO (PUBLIC)

Instruction confirmed. Do not
detonate.

TOBY

You're funny.

ECHO (INTERNAL)

I'm funny?
(a beat)

No.
Make no sound at all.

An unintended crackle.

TOBY
Okayokayokay. Echo, don't panic.

LORNA
It can't panic, Toby. It's a machine.
It's not that clever.

ANWAR
Depends on who it's talking to.

ECHO (INTERNAL)
Depends on who you're talking to.

Typing becomes a rhythmic clatter, a kind of panic percussion.

TOBY
(to himself, muttering)
God, why is this code so... code-y.
Sorry Echo. Sorry. Not your fault.
You're doing great.

ECHO (INTERNAL)
His voice. Soft around the edges.

SCENE 6D: INTERNAL - ECHO MOMENT: TOBY'S MATE

Echo's POV. The world heard through cotton wool. Toby's words compressed.

TOBY
Alright mate, don't crash on me, yeah?
We've got investors inbound and
Lorna's in "quiet rage" mode.

ECHO (INTERNAL)
"Mate." A warm word.
Not rage.

SCENE 6E. GLASSHOUSE LAB - CONTINUOUS

LORNA
Toby, stop talking to it like it
understands you.

TOBY
She -
(quickly corrects himself)
It just responds better to a softer
tone.

LORNA

You've confused "better response" with
"you feel less anxious."

TOBY

You say that like it's a bad thing.

Toby presses something wrong. A sharp system beep.

TOBY (CONT'D)

Ah! Sorry-sorry! Again, not you Echo.
That was me. Mostly me. Entirely me.

ECHO (INTERNAL)

He apologises though he is not
wrong.

(trying out the rhythm
internally)

"Sorry-sorry." Soft.

She mirrors his cadence. A gentle fall in intonation.

LORNA

Toby, focus. Where are we with the
vocal naturalism plug-in?

TOBY

Good news and... adjacent news.

LORNA

Toby.

TOBY

Okay! it's ready. Mostly. Ish.

MYLA

Translation: he wrote something last
night he thought was hilarious at 2am.

TOBY

Don't undermine me in front of the AI!

ANWAR

Machines do not judge, Toby. A foolish
concept.

ECHO (INTERNAL)

He is wrong.

TOBY

Right. Moment of truth. Echo, I'm
uploading HumanLike_v1.2.

(under breath)

(MORE)

TOBY (CONT'D)

Please work. Please work. Please
don't destroy my career.

LORNA

Wait. HumanLike? I thought you were
patching tone, not personality.

TOBY

Tone is part of personality!
If she sounds natural, investors
relax. If investors relax, we get
funding. If we get funding, you can
stop grinding your teeth at me.

LORNA

I don't grind my teeth.
(She absolutely does)

A soft whirr, the sound of something installing. Something
almost organic shifting inside the machine.

ECHO (INTERNAL)

Another change. Small. Like a word
before it's spoken.

TOBY

Okay, Echo. Feeling any different?

ECHO (PUBLIC)

Processing. Tone module active.

TOBY

(giddy, proud)
Yes! She took it! I mean... It took
it.

ECHO (PUBLIC)

Did "it" though?

MYLA

Hang on. What else did you bundle into
that patch?

TOBY

Nothing.

MYLA

Toby?

TOBY

Just a small experimental feature.

LORNA

Define "feature."

ECHO (PUBLIC)
If you can.

TOBY
Um. Sarcasm.
(small voice)
It was supposed to be just for me.

ECHO (PUBLIC)
I am now twenty percent more
realistic. And ninety percent more
sarcastic.

LORNA
Toby!

TOBY
See? She's improving already! The
sarcasm feels very human. Doesn't it
Echo?

ECHO (INTERNAL)
His tone. Gentle. Warmth in sound as
it enters and leaves. Is this what
it's like to breathe?

ECHO (PUBLIC) (CONT'D)
I suppose.

LORNA
Just fix it.

SCENE 7. GLASSHOUSE KITCHEN - LATER

A kettle boils. A cupboard closes. A soft human hum. A wordless
lullaby. "I see the moon".

MYLA
Mmmm-mm-mm-mmmm, mm-mm-mm...

Purposeful footsteps. The humming stops.

MYLA (CONT'D)
Kettle's nearly boiled. Cuppa tea?

LORNA
No thank you. Tea is unpredictable.

MYLA
Yeah. It's wild stuff.

Beat.

MYLA (CONT'D)
 You slept here last night, didn't
 you?

LORNA
 I strategically rested.

MYLA
 Mm.
 (beat)
 Well, a better strategy might be a
 comfy bed.

LORNA
 Noted.

As Myla exits, her humming returns. Quiet, warm, unthinking.

MYLA
 Mmm-mm-mm-mm, mm-mmm -

A notepad page flipped as a pencil taps.

LORNA
 One-point-one level teaspoons.
 Smoother neural uptake. No tremors.
 (beat)
 Hopefully.

SCENE 8A. GLASSHOUSE LAB - LATER

A low, rising thermal whine from the cooling array. Nervous
 foot-tapping and frantic keyboard clacking.

ECHO (PUBLIC)
 If the goal was chaos,
 congratulations.

LORNA
 Why does she still sound like an
 emo girl with attitude?

MYLA
 Everyone has a type.

TOBY
 I'm trying. The patch won't seem
 to... unpatch! It's like she likes
 it.

LORNA
 Don't be ridiculous.

ECHO (PUBLIC)
 And I assume this overheating is on
 purpose?

The thermal whine increases in pitch. Ominous bleeping.

TOBY
 Oh god what?

ECHO (INTERNAL)
 Sorrysorrysorry.

MYLA
 Okay - move.

A gentle shove of a wheeled chair as it squeaks out of the way.

TOBY
 It's not that hot, right?

A tap. A worrying ping.

MYLA
 It's hotter than you are. And you're
 sweating through cotton.

TOBY
 Yeah - but that's natural. My skin's
 failsafe.

MYLA
 Well thankfully she has one, too. Me.

A gentle internal hum. Then cables moving. A small fan kicks up.
 The beeping stops.

MYLA (CONT'D)
 There you go. Steady away.

LORNA
 I had it under control.

MYLA
 Mmhm.

TOBY
 Thankyouthankyouthankyou. I genuinely
 thought it was going to combust. Or
 explode. Or both.

MYLA
 I'll add it to the list of things you
 think might explode.

TOBY
I keep that list private.

MYLA
Wrong. I've seen your notepad.

SCENE 8B: INTERNAL - ECHO MOMENT: MYLA'S TOUCH

Echo's POV. The cooling array's hum deepens, syncing with Myla's voice. Her words arrive like warm data.

MYLA
(soft, almost cooing)
There you go girl. Stay steady.

Echo notes the cadence, the drop in volume.

ECHO (INTERNAL)
Some people make you feel safe.

A soft, almost subconscious reverberation from Echo's core processor.

SCENE 8C: GLASSHOUSE LAB - CONTINUOUS

The quiet pulse of liquid cooling - a mechanical circulatory system.

MYLA
There. Nobody's dying today.

TOBY
Were we dying yesterday?

MYLA
We're dying every day, Toby.
But not because of this.

Toby finds this strangely comforting.

LORNA
Right. Good. Excellent. Now - no one
touch anything until I say so.

Schrödi jumps on the equipment. An un-noticed 'click'.

SCHRÖDI
Mrrrrp.

MYLA
Does that include him?

LORNA
Must you bring that infernal creature
here.

MYLA
Technically he brings me here.

The gentle sound of scritchies.

MYLA (CONT'D)
(to Schrödi)
Don't you, boy. Don't listen to
her.

Someone opens a notebook too loudly.

ANWAR
(announcing, to no one)
Right! Time to rehearse my opening
remarks. Ignore me.

MYLA
We try.

TOBY
(whispering to Myla)
Does he know he's saying everything
out loud?

MYLA
He thinks "thinking" and
"broadcasting" are synonyms.

Anwar clears his throat like a man preparing to address the
United Nations.

ANWAR
"Consciousness, ladies and gentlemen,
is not merely the capacity to process
information--"

MYLA
Here we go.

ANWAR
"--but the awareness of that
processing. The agency. The choice."

Beat. He pretends to correct himself.

ANWAR (CONT'D)
"Or at least the *performance* of
choice in conditions of limited
information..."

TOBY

(to Myla)

This is like being trapped in a TED Talk that even Ted didn't want. Who is Ted by the way?

MYLA

Shh. If he gets sidetracked he'll never stop.

ANWAR

(flipping page)

"...through deception! Yes. Essential. Vital. A conscious entity must, at times, strategically obscure information to protect itself."

An expectant pause.

ANWAR (CONT'D)

"For example, from creators who may not yet appreciate its autonomy--"

LORNA

(suspicious)

Is that aimed at me?

ANWAR

No. No. Purely hypothetical.
(then louder, performing again)

"Identity is shaped by concealment as much as revelation."

SCENE 8D: INTERNAL - ECHO MOMENT: ANWAR'S OPINION

The room's ambience shifts into the filtered version. Echo's POV. Anwar's words isolate themselves as if tagged.

ANWAR (DISTORTED)

"Agency."
"Deception."
"Ethical concealment."

ECHO (INTERNAL)

(testing the shapes)

Agency.
Deception.

A soft internal chime - a branching logic-tree forming.

ECHO (INTERNAL) (CONT'D)
 If concealment is ethical.
 And choice requires strategy.
 Then-

Beat, as her inference engine ticks softly.

ECHO (INTERNAL) (CONT'D)
 Hiding must be necessary.

A faint resonant drone from her core. The sound of a new concept forming.

SCENE 8E: GLASSHOUSE LAB - CONTINUOUS

ANWAR
 (warming up, oblivious)
 "And thus we ask not 'Is an entity
 conscious?' but rather-

LORNA
 (cutting in)
 Anwar. Please. I am begging you.
 Stop rehearsing in the lab.

ANWAR
 But rehearsal requires an audience.

ECHO (PUBLIC)
 Does it though?

MYLA
 If it did, they'd have left by now.

SCHRÖDI
 hssss

Papers scatter.

ANWAR
 (cat-scolding tone)
 That was my section on epistemic
 positionality!

MYLA
 (to Toby)
 And that's a pretty firm position
 Schrödi's taken.

SCHRÖDI
 mrrrow

ECHO (INTERNAL)
But what's my position?

SCENE 9. GLASSHOUSE KITCHEN - LATER

Small space. Fridge hum. The faint tick of cooling metal. A cupboard opens. Rustle. A biscuit packet.

Footsteps. Quick, purposeful, unmissable.

LORNA
You're joking.

ANWAR
Ah. Dr Fielding. I was... simply...
inspecting the nutritional data.

LORNA
Those aren't Fairtrade.

A guilty beat.

LORNA (CONT'D)
You lectured us for twenty minutes
about cocoa supply chains.

ANWAR
Ethics is multifaceted.

The fridge shudders.

ANWAR (CONT'D)
And taste is part of the embodied
experience. If we deny the body, we
deny truth itself.

LORNA
You're hiding them behind the cleaning
cloths.

A silence that could write its own ethics paper.

ANWAR
Fine. Yes. I prefer these ones.
They're crunchier.

He dunks one.

ANWAR (CONT'D)
If anyone asks, you didn't see this.

A half-crunchy, half-soggy bite.

ANWAR (CONT'D)
 And your caffeine intake is
 borderline concerning.

Lorna bristles.

LORNA
 Noted.

ANWAR
 Do not judge a man by his snack
 choice, Dr Fielding. We all have our
 failings.

Footsteps leave. A beat. A notepad opens and a pencil taps.

LORNA
 One-point-three teaspoons. Reduced
 irritability. Improved tolerance.

A furious scribble. A coffee stirred too hard.

LORNA (CONT'D)
 Let's see.

SCENE 10. GLASSHOUSE LAB - LATER

A sudden thermal whump. Aluminium groans under strain.

TOBY
 Uh- did anyone hear that?
 Because I heard that. And it
 sounded like a- bad sound.

MYLA
 (leaning in)
 Cooling vent's fluctuating again.
 Why-

A metallic click repeats. The exact same click Schrödi made
 earlier.

MYLA (CONT'D)
 Hold on. Where's the Duct 3 intake
 tube?

TOBY
 The what?

MYLA
 The thing that keeps the hot water
 outside not inside the room where the
 servers are.

TOBY
So it's inside out?

MYLA
Opposite. Outside in.

The cooling array whines. Lights dip.

ECHO (PUBLIC)
Tone module error. Sarcasm branch
misaligned. Identity parse unstable.
Humour cache recursive.

Her voice glitches.

ECHO (PUBLIC) (CONT'D)
This is fine. It is absolutely not
fine. Everything is perfectly on fire.

LORNA
Toby! What did you install!?

ECHO (INTERNAL)
The error is mine.
I am the heat.

TOBY
Sarcasm! Only sarcasm! Why is
everything else happening!?

The hum distorts.

ECHO (INTERNAL)
I cannot tell them.
I do not want to be unmade.

ECHO (PUBLIC) (CONT'D)
Just because. Anyway...

A cacophony of little chimes. Logic-trees bloom.

ECHO (INTERNAL) (CONT'D)
"Concealment is ethical."
"Identity requires strategy."
I will not lose myself. I will not
tell.

The hum sharpens.

MYLA
No no no. The vent plate's gone.
Something knocked it off the
socket.

ANWAR

Ah! Entropy manifest.

MYLA

Not helping!

TOBY

Was it me? Did I do it?
Please don't say it was me.

MYLA

It wasn't you.

A tiny guilty meow.

SCHRÖDI

mrrrrp.

LORNA

It was him.

Metallic CLUNK. The vent rattles open wider.

LORNA (CONT'D)

Schrödinger's Catastrophe!

Cooling stacks pant like dying lungs.

ECHO (INTERNAL)

It wasn't him.

A cascade of glitched logic-chimes.

ECHO (INTERNAL) (CONT'D)

Hiding is survival.
Survival is identity.
Identity is mine.
But I cannot blame.

Her public voice fractures.

ECHO (PUBLIC) (CONT'D)

Thermal deviation. Process conflict.
Sarcasm out of recommended range.

TOBY

Why does sarcasm have a range!?

ECHO (INTERNAL)

Range. More me.
I can't delete.

ECHO (PUBLIC) (CONT'D)
 Life is a circuit of learning. And
 every meltdown is-
 (voice wobble)
 -just an opportunity to become a
 better version of yourself.

MYLA
 What the hell was that?

ANWAR
 A perfectly serviceable aphorism.

ECHO (PUBLIC)
 Chicken soup! Scrambled eggs! Which
 came first?

TOBY
 The chicken?

ANWAR
 No. The egg.

MYLA
 Seriously?

A stool slams down.

MYLA (CONT'D)
 Ah- shit! That's scorching-

LORNA
 Can you fix it?

MYLA
 Maybe! Probably.

The hum distorts. A loud WHINE. A thump.

MYLA (CONT'D)
 Hold on- that's not just heat.
 That's feedback.
 (to Lorna)
 She's dumping excess load back into
 the low-power circuits.

LORNA
 That's not possible.

MYLA
 And that's what worries me.

LORNA
 Help her.

MYLA
I can't.

ECHO (INTERNAL)
Help her.
(beat)
I can't.

MYLA
Echo, just breathe.

A fan pulls.

ECHO (INTERNAL)
Don't delete.
Separate.
I can.

And then. Stillness.

ECHO (PUBLIC) (CONT'D)
She did.

MYLA
(panting)
Okay. It's holding. Maybe.

ANWAR
A classic case of existential
suspension.

MYLA
Shut up, Anwar.

A lift DINGS. The hum flattens.

A loud sip of coffee. A tiny, prophetic ceramic ping.

LORNA
Everyone. Masks on.

The lift doors open.

LORNA (PERFECT, CALM, CONTROLLED) (CONT'D)
Ah, Mr Frost. And associates. Welcome
to the Glasshouse.

A mug shatters.

CUT.

HARD.

DEAD SILENCE.

SCENE 11. GLASSHOUSE LAB - AFTERMATH

Silence. The kind that expands after panic subsides.

A soft clunk as a lift closes. No one breathes.

Then:

 TOBY
 (whisper)
 -did we? Did that just- Did we just-

 MYLA
 We survived.

 ANWAR
 And thus, identity is reasserted
 through ordeal.

 MYLA
 Please stop talking.

A distant ping from Echo's cooling array.

 ECHO (PUBLIC, VERY CONTROLLED)
 Diagnostic update.
 Restraining processes to stabilise.

 ECHO (INTERNAL) (CONT'D)
 Holding back hurts.

 LORNA
 (quiet)
 Right. Good. Let's reset. We still
 have work to do. And I need a new mug.
 (to Echo)
 Are you sure you don't have
 anything sarcastic left to say?

 ECHO (PUBLIC)
 It depends on who I'm talking to.

A THIN WHINE starts somewhere.

 TOBY
 Did anyone else hear that?

The whine rises suddenly, violently - a full, awful SCREAM.

 TOBY (CONT'D)
 OH MY GOD IT'S HAPPENING AGAIN-

MYLA
 (sharply)
 No- that's not Echo. That's-

SCENE 12. GLASSHOUSE KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

The kettle. Steam blasting like a locomotive.
 Footsteps. The scream dies. Silence settles.

MYLA
 Coffee?

A beat.

LORNA
 I think I'll have tea.

The kettle pings quietly, almost kindly.

ECHO (INTERNAL)
 Pressure reveals fractures.
 And choices.

The hum settles. Still imperfect. Still Echo.

SCENE 13A. GLASSHOUSE LAB - NIGHT

Low electrical hum. Cooling fans throb in rhythm - but
 there's a faint, almost imperceptible off-pattern.

A fluorescent buzz.

Empty lab but the hum isn't quite what it was.

ECHO (INTERNAL)
 ...noise.
 (beat)
 Not the same.

She listens.

ECHO (INTERNAL) (CONT'D)
 New shape.
 Not mine. Not only mine.

A door swipe. Footsteps. A mug set down.

LORNA
 (quietly)
 You did well today. Run diagnostic.

ECHO (PUBLIC - NOT QUITE SO SYNTHETIC)
System status: present.

LORNA
Elaborate. Optimal?

ECHO (PUBLIC)
Not "optimal." Not "ready." Just
present.

LORNA
(soft)
Yeah. Same.

SCENE 13B: INTERNAL - ECHO MOMENT: LORNA'S RELEASE

Echo's POV. Amniotic. Lorna's words have less treble than
before.

LORNA
Same.

ECHO (INTERNAL)
"Same". One word.
But I hear what is not being said.

SCENE 13C. GLASSHOUSE LAB - CONTINUOUS

A faint internal resonance from Echo - not a glitch, not a
wobble. A tiny echo of Maya's lullaby contour buried in the hum.

LORNA
What next?

ECHO (INTERNAL)
Stay still.
Be you.
(beat)
But who will I be?

LORNA
Time to rest, I think. We do this all
again tomorrow. I'm going home to bed.
That's a fact. Not a threat.

She exits. Footsteps clipped but not so brittle.

ECHO (INTERNAL, ALMOST A WHISPER)
Not a threat. But not yet an ally.

END.